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MCCOLLUM, LEGISLATIVE LEADERS TARGET CYBERPREDATORS

Florida to Toughen Penalties on Child Pornographers and Predators Who Travel to Meet Kids, Partner with MySpace.com in Requiring E-mail and IM Registration of Sex Offenders

TALLAHASSEE, FL – Attorney General Bill McCollum and House Speaker Marco Rubio (R-Miami) were joined today by Representative David Rivera (R-Miami), Senator Nancy Argenziano (R-Crystal River), Hemanshu Nigam, Chief Security Officer for Fox Interactive Media and MySpace.com, and law enforcement and child protection advocates today in announcing their support for the Cybercrimes Against Children Act of 2007 (House Bill 573), a bill to increase the penalties against sexual predators who use the internet to prey on children.

“We hear repeatedly from moms and dads all over our state about the need to help keep their children safe from cyberpredators,” said Speaker Rubio. “We require all sex offenders to register their physical and mailing addresses, but in today’s Internet age, it is critical that we know where they are on the Internet as well. I thank the Attorney General for his leadership on the issue, and I also thank MySpace.com for partnering with us in developing solutions to help keep kids safe.”

“I applaud Representative David Rivera and Senator Nancy Argenziano for promoting this vital legislation which will bring longer jail sentences to those who sexually exploit our children using the Internet,” said Attorney General McCollum. “This legislation sends a clear message to online predators who abuse our children. This type of behavior will not be tolerated in Florida.”

“Government’s primary function is public safety, and no one is more deserving of our protection than Florida’s children” said Representative David Rivera, the House Sponsor of HB 573. “This legislation will empower law enforcement professionals to go after the criminals who target

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children in our state, and the strict punishments we are asking for will deter anyone from even thinking of committing these crimes in Florida.”

Sen. Nancy Argenziano, who is sponsoring the Senate companion bill (Senate Bill 1004) added that the main purpose of this legislation is to protect Florida’s children.

“Every time we prevent one of these heinous crimes from occurring, we protect the innocence of a child,” Sen. Nancy Argenziano said. “The children of Florida are our most precious asset. We must do everything we can to protect them from evil.”

According to the Federal Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force, Florida ranks third in the nation in volume of child pornography, and one in seven American children between the ages of ten and seventeen is solicited online by a sexual predator.

The passage of the Cybercrimes Against Children Act of 2007 will:

- Create a new second degree felony, with up to a fifteen year jail sentence, for predators that contact a child online and then attempt to meet the child for the purpose of abusing them sexually.
- Increase penalties for possession or promotion of child pornography that include images of children under five, sexual battery of a child, sadomasochistic abuse of child, bestiality involving a child or any pornographic video or live movie of a child.
 - For possession of these images, the charge increases a second degree felony from a third degree felony (increases jail time from five years to fifteen years).
 - For promotion and distribution of these images, the charge increases to a first degree felony from a second degree felony (increases jail time from fifteen to thirty years jail time).
- Penalizes offenders for any misrepresentation of their age as it relates to Internet sex crimes involving minors. Such an offense would be classified as a second degree felony.
- Expands the jurisdictional oversight of the Office of Statewide Prosecution (OSP). The bill allows the OSP to take initiative in any child abuse case related to or facilitated by the Internet, in addition to allowing the OSP to intervene in all criminal cases involving Internet crime in general.
- Broadens current law to encompass all computer related devices or equipment which is used to transmit sexual images or engage in lewd or indecent conversation with a minor. Additionally, the bill allows each illicit Internet contact between a minor and an adult to be charged separately.
- Requires mandatory reporting of sexual predators’ email addresses and instant message screen names. This information would be added to the data already compiled by the Department of Law Enforcement, the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles, the Department of Corrections, and local sheriffs’ offices.

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- Allows the Department of Law Enforcement to release email or screen name data to commercial social networking websites. When MySpace.com, or any other social networking site, comes across the email address or IM name of a registered sex offender they will now have the ability to both delete and/or block these individuals from accessing their site.

Protecting Florida's children from cyberpredators on social networking sites are Ideas 41 and 66 of the House's 100 Ideas.

On the web: www.myfloridahouse.gov or www.myfloridalegal.com

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